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Description

This invention pertains to absorbent materials or structures, and more particularly to a stretchable absorbent composite for absorbing and retaining liquids.

Various types of absorbent structures presently exist, and include single and multilayer structures comprising materials such as cellulosic fluff, synthetic fibers, blends of fluff and synthetic fibers, and these various structures with superabsorbent materials.

One such absorbent structure as is known in the art is described in patent Document AU-A-0 563 841, entitled "Elasticized Disposable Diapers" and in which an absorbent batt is directly bonded to a backing sheet and indirectly bonded, at its marginal portion to a panel and a facing sheet.

Some of the important characteristics or features such absorbent structures should preferably possess are rapid transfer rates and absorbent rates, high capacity, high retention, dry flexibility and wet flexibility, dry integrity and wet integrity, and low flowback properties.

One of the recurring problems with current absorbent structures is that they sacrifice one or more of the above characteristics or features in order to possess or increase the effect of others. For example, absorbency generally can be maximized by a combination of fluff and superabsorbent material, but one of the problems with this combination is its integrity. When dry, the fluff tends to be redistributed by the movement or activities of the wearer, thereby decreasing its absorbency in the areas of maximum wetting. Similarly, after wetting, the combination tends to gather or cluster into separate masses or lumps of wetted fluff, which are very uncomfortable and visibly embarrassing to the wearer.

One solution to the above problem is to provide a mechanism that maintains the integrity of the absorbent material, such as introducing amounts of binders, synthetic fibers or the like. Though this may increase dry and wet integrity, it generally causes a decrease in absorbency and in flexibility, which to the wearer translates into a relatively stiff-feeling material or structure. The present invention intends to overcome this problem. This is achieved by providing a stretchable absorbent composite as defined in independent claim 1, and by providing a method of making a stretchable absorbent composite as defined in claim 19. Further advantageous features of the invention are evident from the dependent claims.

In one form of the invention, there is provided a stretchable absorbent composite for receiving, absorbing and retaining liquids and waste materials comprising a liquid-pervious layer, a liquid-impervi-

ous layer, an absorbent layer, and a liquid-pervious stretchable layer between the liquid-pervious layer and liquid-impervious layer. The stretchable layer is stretch-bonded to the other layers and forms a plurality of rugosities in the other layers upon relaxing the stretchable layer.

In another form of the invention, there is provided a method of making a stretchable absorbent composite comprising the steps of providing a liquid-pervious layer, a liquid-pervious stretchable layer, an absorbent layer and a liquid-impervious layer; stretching the stretchable layer; bonding the layers together with the stretchable layer in the stretched state; releasing the bonded layers; and forming a plurality of rugosities in the liquid-pervious layer, the absorbent layer and the liquid-impervious layer upon release of the stretchable layer.

The above-mentioned and other features and objects of this invention, and the manner of attaining them, will become more apparent, and the invention itself will be better understood by reference to the following description of an embodiment of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 illustrates one embodiment of the composite before the layers are joined together;

Figure 2 is the embodiment of Figure 1 after the layers have been joined together;

Figure 3 illustrates another embodiment of the composite before the layers are joined together;

Figure 4 is the embodiment in Figure 3 after the layers have been joined together;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of the embodiment in Figure 4 with the top two layers peeled back in order to view the apertures in one of the layers;

Figure 5A is a multi-directional stretchable absorbent composite;

Figure 5B is an enlarged cross section through Figure 2;

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate another embodiment of the composite before and after, respectively, the layers have been joined together;

Figures 8 and 9 illustrate yet another embodiment of the composite before and after, respectively, the layers have been joined together;

Figures 10 and 11 illustrate still another embodiment of the composite before and after, respectively, the layers have been joined together;

Figures 12 and 13 illustrate another embodiment of the composite before and after, respectively, the layers have been joined together;

Figure 14 is a schematic of an apparatus for making a stretchable absorbent composite;

Figure 15 is a photographic plan view of one side of a unidirectionally stretched composite;

Figure 16 is similar to Figure 15 of the other side;

Figure 17 is a photographic plan view of one side of a multi-stretched composite; and

Figure 18 is similar to Figure 17 of the other side.

As used herein and in the claims, the term "elastic," "elastic characteristics," "stretch" and "stretchable" are used interchangeably to define a material or composite which can be elongated by at least 25% of its relaxed length, i.e., elongated to at least 1-1/4 times its relaxed length (an elongation of 25%), and which will recover upon release of the applied force at least 10% of its elongation. According to this definition, upon release of the applied force at 25% elongation, the material or composite must recover to at least about a 15% elongation. For example, a material or composite is deemed to be "elastic" if a sample length of 100 centimeters can be elongated to a length of at least 125 centimeters, and upon release of the applied force recovers to a length of not more than about 115 centimeters. Many elastic or stretchable materials or composites can be elongated by more than 25% of their relaxed length, and many of these will recover to, or close to, their original relaxed length upon release of the applied force. This latter class of materials is generally preferred for purposes of the present invention. These materials can include not only webs of elastic or stretchable films, such as cast or blow films, but also nonwoven fibrous elastic webs such as melt-blown elastomeric fibrous nonwoven webs.

The term "bonding" can mean the joining, adhering, connecting, attaching or the like of two layers or composites, either directly or indirectly together. For example, three layers are directly bonded together if the bond is effective throughout the three layers. These three layers are also said to be bonded if, for example, the outermost two layers are directly bonded along their peripheries so as to capture or sandwich the middle layer therebetween.

The term "transfer layer" refers to a layer of material that primarily directs fluid flow in the Z-direction, which is the direction through the thickness of the layer.

The term "wicking layer" refers to a layer that primarily directs liquid flow in multiple directions in the X-Y plane, which is the plane defined by the length and width of the layer.

Referring to Figures 1 and 2, one embodiment of the stretchable absorbent composite 2 comprises liquid-permeable bodyside liner 4, liquid-permeable stretchable or elastomeric layer 6, absorbent medium 8 and liquid-impermeable outer cover 10. In this particular embodiment, elastomeric layer 6 is made permeable by a plural-

ity of apertures 12 disposed therein.

Figure 1 illustrates composite 2 with the layers separated and the stretchable or elastomeric layer 6 in its relaxed, unstretched condition. In the manufacture of composite 2, which will be described in greater detail below, elastomeric layer 6 is stretched to a desired elongation, and then liner 4, elastomeric layer 6, absorbent assembly 8 and cover 10 are bonded together. After the bonding, composite 2 is relaxed so that elastomeric layer 6 will recover from its stretched state. In doing so, liner 4, absorbent medium 8 and outer cover 10 are gathered, as illustrated in Figure 2, to form a plurality of rugosities 14 and a plurality of air pockets 9 on either side of elastomeric layer 6 within or inside composite 2. Naturally, rugosities 14 inherently form or create air spaces between one another. When elastomeric layer 6 is elongated in a single direction, such as the machine direction indicated by arrows in Figure 5, the rows 16 (Figs. 5 and 15, 16) of rugosities 14, and air pockets 9, are generally perpendicular to the direction, i.e., machine direction of elongation of elastomeric layer 6. If elastomeric layer 6 is multi-directionally elongated, for example, in the X- and Y-directions, then the finished stretchable absorbent composite 2 has a quilted-like or wormy pattern, as illustrated in Figs. 5A and 17, 18.

Figure 5B illustrates an enlarged cross-sectional view through composite 2 in Figure 2. Because elastomeric layer 6 is in its relaxed, unstretched condition, liner 4, absorbent 8 and cover 10 have been gathered into a plurality of rows 16 of rugosities 14. Since these layers, i.e., liner 4, absorbent 8 and cover 10, are gathered into rugosities 14, there is a greater amount of surface area per square cm. (or sq. in.) than if the layers were flat or planar. Furthermore, each rugosity 14 has a plurality of smaller or finer wrinkles 18 in its opposite surfaces 20 which extend outwardly relative to elastomeric layer 6. Both rugosities 14 and wrinkles 18 are formed upon relaxing elastomeric layer 6, but they have been differentiated herein to distinguish the larger irregularities of rugosities 14 with the finer irregularities of wrinkles 18. Wrinkles 18 also serve the same purpose as rugosities 14 in providing a larger surface area per square cm. (or sq. in.) of composite 2, as compared to a flat or planar surface.

Since stretchable absorbent composite 2 has a greater surface area per square cm. (or sq. in.) due to rugosities 14, wrinkles 18, and air pockets 9, it has been discovered that the functions of the particular layers are surprisingly increased. For example, because liner 4 is gathered into a bulky condition, it has a greater surface area per square cm. (or sq. in.) which results in increased surface dryness. Naturally, the greater the surface area of a

liquid-receiving layer, the greater amount of liquid the layer can act upon. Similarly, absorbent 8, because of rugosities 14, wrinkles 18, and pockets 9, has an improved capacity per unit area for receiving, absorbing and retaining liquid. Again, because of the increased surface area per square cm. (or sq. in.) of absorbent medium 8, it is better able to handle or manage greater amounts of liquid, as compared to a flat or planar absorbent of the same finished dimensions.

With reference to outer cover 10, the rugosities 14 and wrinkles 18 provide a cover that is quieter during body movement and present a cloth-like appearance.

Liquid permeable bodyside liner 4 can be a nonwoven web or sheet of polyolefin fibers, such as polypropylene, polyester, polyethylene, Rayon, Chisso and the like. Liner 4 can also be a nonwoven web of synthetic or natural fibers or a blend thereof, a plastic film with perforations or an expanded plastic webbing material or a scrim material. Preferably, liner 4 is spunbonded polyethylene or spunbonded polypropylene having a basis weight of 5.67 grams to 28.35 grams (about 0.2 to about 1.0 ounces per square yard). More preferably, liner 4 is spunbonded polypropylene having a basis weight of about 5.67 grams to about 28.35 grams (about 0.2 to about 1.0 ounces per square yard.) The material of which liner 4 will be made for any specific embodiment or variation can vary depending upon the exact properties or characteristics desired of liner 4. Generally, it is desired that liner 4 be hydrophobic and have high fluid transfer rates, such as a penetration rate of about 0.05 to about 8.0 ml/sec/cm², and preferably about 0.5 to about 2.5 ml/sec/cm². Liner 4 also exhibits good hand properties.

A wide variety of materials can be employed as elastomeric layer 6 and include not only webs of elastic films, such as cast or blown films, but also nonwoven fibrous elastic webs such as, for example, meltblown or spunbonded elastomeric fibrous nonwoven webs. Elastomers may be incorporated into any one of the layers, for example, the meltblown liner, the staple coform absorbent, or the film. Other materials, such as self-adhering elastomeric materials and extrudable elastic films that shrink and become elastic when cooled, are also suitable for use as elastomeric layer 6. A useful material for making elastomeric layer 6, and most preferably for making meltblown elastomeric fibers, is a block copolymer having the general formula A-B-A' wherein A and A' are each a thermoplastic polymer endblock or segment which includes a styrenic moiety and B is an elastomeric polymer midblock such as a conjugated diene or lower alkene. Materials of this general type are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,333,782, issued

June 8, 1980 to H. A. Pieniak. Similar materials are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,418,123, issued November 29, 1983 to William L. Bunnelle. Commercially available A-B-A' block copolymers having thermoplastic polystyrene endblocks or segments and a saturated or essentially saturated poly-(ethylene-butylene) midblock B or segment, sometimes referred to as an S-EB-S polymer, are available under the trade designation KRATON G, for example, Kraton G-1650, Kraton G-1652, Kraton GX-1657 and Kraton G-2740X, from The Shell Chemical Company. Other examples of elastomeric materials for use in the present invention include polyester elastomeric materials such as, for example, those available under the trade designation Hytrel from E. I. DuPont de Nemours and Company; polyurethane elastomeric material such as, for example, those available under the designation Estane from B. F. Goodrich and Company; and polyamide elastomeric material such as, for example, those available under the trade designation Pebax from the Rilsan Company.

Suitable elastic films, as distinguished from an elastic nonwoven web of elastomeric fibers, may also be utilized in accordance with the invention, for example, elastic film sold under the trade name Polytrope by A. Schulman Corporation of Akron, Ohio.

Elastomeric layer 6 is elongatable or stretchable from about 10% to about 800% of its relaxed length, and has good recovery such as at least about 10%. Elastomeric layer 6 also includes apertures 12 that allow rapid fluid passage or transfer therethrough in the direction toward absorbent medium 8 and eliminates or minimizes liquid flow in the reverse direction. Generally, apertures 12 are provided in any manner resulting in the desired fluid transfer properties or rates. Elastomeric layer 6 can also be liquid-permeable due to inherent pores in the material. For example, a meltblown process provides pores in the meltblown product and the addition of a surfactant, if necessary, makes the meltblown product hydrophilic. A preferred basis weight for elastomeric layer 6 is about 10 grams per square meter to about 200 grams per square meter, and a more preferred basis weight is about 60 grams per square meter to about 150 grams per square meter.

Absorbent medium 8 can be made of any suitable absorbent material, for example, a cellulosic material such as an air-formed batt of wood pulp fibers or a batt of meltblown fibers such as polypropylene, polyethylene, polyester and the like. Absorbent medium 8 may also be bonded carded web of synthetic or natural fibers, a composite of meltblown fibers of polypropylene, polyethylene, polyester mixed with a cellulosic material, or a blend of cellulosic material with staple textile fibers

such as Rayon and the like. Absorbent medium 8 may also contain superabsorbent materials to increase its absorbent capacity. Examples of suitable superabsorbent materials include grafted starch, starch polyacrylic acid grafted methyl cellulose, modified polyvinyl alcohols, polyacrylic acid salts that are cross-linked to form absorbent polymers and the like. Absorbent medium 8 may also include layers of different absorbent structure, such as a meltblown layer of polypropylene and a layer of fluff with a superabsorbent material. Absorbent medium 8 may also be made of a foam-type material or a coform material.

In one preferred embodiment, absorbent medium 8 comprises a blend of 70% by weight polyester and 30% by weight of a binder, such as Chisso, having a basis weight of about 70 grams per square meter and mixed therewith a superabsorbent with a basis weight of about 16 grams per square meter.

In another preferred embodiment, absorbent medium 8 is a blend of 60% by weight fluff pulp and 40% by weight polyethylene, having a basis weight of about 150 grams per square meter, with a superabsorbent having a basis weight of about 16 grams per square meter mixed therewith.

Outer cover 10 can be made of any suitable liquid-impermeable material and can also be made of a liquid-impermeable, air-permeable material. Outer cover 10 is preferably made of a polyethylene or polypropylene film having a thickness between about .007 mm (about 0.3 mil) to about .038 mm (about 1.5 mils) preferably about .015 mm (about 0.6 mils). Outer cover 10 can also be a meltblown or film material made of polyethylene, polypropylene or polyolefin copolymers such as ethylene vinyl acetate, ethylene methyl acrylate, ethylene ethyl acrylate, polyvinyl chloride, Nylon and the like. Other acceptable materials include a single spunbonded layer of the above types of materials, two layers of spunbonded and meltblown materials or a three-layer material of spunbonded, meltblown and spunbonded material. Suitable foam materials may also be used as outer cover 10 and include such foams as polyester, polyurethane, and EVA blended with polyester or polyurethane.

Outer cover 10 also has good hand properties.

Although Figures 1 and 2 illustrate composite 2 having elastomeric layer 6 between liner 4 and absorbent medium 8, the two can be interchanged such that absorbent medium 8 is adjacent liner 4 and elastomeric layer 6 is adjacent cover 10.

Referring now to Figures 3 and 4, another embodiment of stretchable absorbent composite 2 is illustrated wherein transfer layer 22 has been added between liner 4 and elastomeric layer 6. One of the purposes of transfer layer 22 is to provide rapid fluid transfer in the Z-direction, which

is generally the direction perpendicular to the plane of stretchable absorbent composite 2. By thus providing rapid liquid transfer in the Z-direction, the absorbent rate of stretchable absorbent composite 2 is increased. Transfer layer 22 also preferably has low rewet properties and improved wet resiliency. One method of decreasing rewet properties is by distancing the liner from the absorbent, such as by means of air pockets 9. A method for increasing wet resiliency is the use of synthetic fibers or foams.

Rapid liquid transfer in the Z-direction, which can also be termed the vertical direction with reference to Figures 3 and 4, can be accomplished in one manner by orienting the fibers of transfer layer 22 in the Z-direction. This orientation can be accomplished by an air-laying process.

Transfer layer 22 is preferably a nonwoven web made of thermoplastic fibers, such as polyethylene, polypropylene, polyester and the like. Transfer layer 22 can be a bonded carded web, a meltblown web or a spunbond web of thermoplastic fibers or blends thereof. Specifically, transfer layer 22 can be a bonded carded web comprising 70% by weight of polyester fibers and 30% by weight of a suitable binder, such as Chisso, low-melt powders, and the like, and having a basis weight of about 50 grams per square meter. A preferred basis weight range is about 30 to about 70 grams per square meter. Transfer layer 22 can also be a coform material, such as a carded web of polyester bonded to a spunbonded polypropylene carrier sheet and, if desired, a binding agent such as Chisso, low-melt powders, and the like. Specifically, a coform structure comprising 75% by weight polyester as a carded web bonded to a 25% by weight spunbonded polypropylene carrier sheet. The percentage weights of polyester and polypropylene can be varied as necessary or desired.

As with the embodiment of stretchable absorbent composite 2 in Figures 1 and 2, the embodiment illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 can have transfer layer 22, elastomeric layer 6 and absorbent medium 8 positioned in a different order than illustrated. Any order is acceptable as long as they are between liner 4 and outer cover 10. Preferably, the layers are positioned as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4.

Referring now to Figures 6 and 7, another embodiment of stretchable absorbent composite 2 is illustrated wherein wicking layer 24 has been added between elastomeric layer 6 and absorbent medium 8. Wicking layer 24 serves to rapidly transfer liquid in the X- and Y-directions, which are in the plane of composite 2 so as to provide rapid absorption by absorbent medium 8. The rapid transfer of liquid in the X- and Y-direction is provided by orienting the fibers of wicking layer 24 in

the horizontal direction, as viewed in Figures 6 and 7. In other words, the fibers in wicking layer 24 are generally perpendicular to the fibers in transfer layer 22. This horizontal or X- and Y-orientation of fibers can be attained by various processes, such as wet-laying and carding.

Wicking layer 24 can generally be made of the same type of materials as transfer layer 22.

Wicking layer 24, elastomeric layer 6, and absorbent 8 can be arranged in any order between liner 4 and outer cover 10. However, Figure 6 illustrates the preferred order of liner 4, transfer layer 22, elastomeric layer 6, wicking layer 24, absorbent medium 8 and outer cover 10.

Referring now to Figures 8 and 9, still another embodiment of stretchable absorbent composite 2 comprises liner 4, elastomeric layer 6, wicking layer 24, absorbent medium 8 and outer cover 10. Elastomeric layer 6 and wicking layer 24 can be interchanged in position between liner 4 and absorbent medium 8, as illustrated in Figures 10 and 11.

Figures 12 and 13 illustrate a variation on Figures 6 and 7, wherein layers 22, 24 are interchanged.

Because stretchable absorbent composite 2 contains thermoplastic components in its respective layers, it provides both a dry and wet integrity and resilience, both of which have functional and perceptual benefits. Furthermore, because of the bulking or gathering of resilient materials created by elastomeric layer 6, there is imparted to composite 2 the ability or capacity to maintain an original shape, which is a key factor in achieving superior containment.

Due to the intimate contact of the layers in composite 2 in combination with the overall bulking or gathering thereof, the absorbency characteristics of composite 2 are positively affected; for example, there is an increase in the rate of fluid transfer from the surface to the absorbent medium 8, and a minimizing of any wet collapse or clumping of cellulosic material should wood pulp fibers be a component of absorbent medium 8.

The use of transfer layer 22 and wicking layer 24 provides an increase in absorbent rates at the bond points and controlled flowback properties. A more detailed description of how the absorbent rates are increased at the bond points and the flowback properties minimized can be found in U.S. Patent 4,397,644, filed February 4, 1982, which is incorporated by reference herein.

Referring now to Figure 14, apparatus 57 includes pattern roll 58 having a plurality of projections 62 selectively disposed thereon, and anvil 60 adjacent pattern roll 58 to form nip 64 therebetween. Both pattern roll 58 and anvil 60 are selectively rotatable in the direction of the arrows, and are selectively thermally controlled to provide

a selected temperature on their respective outermost surfaces. Furthermore, either pattern roll 58 or anvil 60, or both, are moveable toward the other to vary selectively the pressure applied at nip 64. As mentioned earlier, projections 62 are selectively disposed on pattern roll 58 in any desired pattern, as further described below.

Apparatus 57 also comprises liner-transfer layer roll 66 that provides a two-layer web comprising liner 4 and transfer layer 22, which can be a coform material earlier described above and preformed separately on roll 66. Elastomeric layer roll 68 provides elastomeric layer 6, wicking layer roll 70 provides wicking layer 24, absorbent medium roll 72 provides absorbent medium 8 and outer cover roll 74 provides outer cover 10. The various roll supplies can be interchanged so as to vary the arrangement of the layers, as illustrated in Figures 1-13.

In order to stretch elastomeric layer 6 before passing through nip 64, the rate of rotation of elastomeric layer roll 68 is selectively decreased below that of the selected rates of rotation of the other rolls 66, 70, 72 and 74. Because elastomeric roll 68 rotates at a slower speed, elastomeric layer 6 is stretched in the machine direction during its travel from roll 68 through nip 64. If desired, elastomeric layer 6 can also be stretched simultaneously, or only, in the cross-direction by use of stretching rolls 76 or any other known means, such as a tenter frame. Generally, stretching rolls 76 are curved or bowed so as to stretch elastomeric layer 6 in the cross-direction while being pulled thereacross. Control of the direction of stretch or elongation of elastomeric layer 6 is a useful feature not only in tailoring the properties and the shaping of the finished composite 2, but also in the handling and manipulating of composite 2 during the manufacturing processes. Naturally, the basis weight and stiffness of elastomeric layer 6 and the other selected layers, and the degree and direction of elongation of layer 6, may be selected to provide the desired properties in the finished composite 2. The stretching of elastomeric layer 6 in the machine direction only, or the cross-direction only, results in rows 16 of rugosities 14, as illustrated in Figures 5, 15, and 16. Similarly, the stretching or elongation of elastomeric layer 6 in both the machine and cross-direction results in the quilted configuration illustrated in Figures 5A, 17, and 18. If desired or necessary, one or all of rolls 76 can be provided with aperturing means, such as sharp or pointed projections, for aperturing elastomeric layer 6, whether it is being uni- or multi-directionally stretched.

As mentioned earlier, projections 62 can be selectively disposed on the outermost surface of pattern roll 58, and in doing so, allows the immo-

bilization of selected areas of the stretchable absorbent composite 2 so as to control and vary the elastic properties. The immobilization effect can be controlled by either increasing or decreasing the number of bond points per unit area or the surface area of each individual bond point in a unit area.

As the bonded layers exit nip 64, they pass between anvil 78 and cutting roll 80, which has a plurality of blades 82 selectively disposed thereon. Blades 82 are selectively positioned to cut the bonded layers in any configuration.

Although pattern roll 58 with projections 62 is one method of bonding the layers together thermally, other bonding methods are contemplated by the method of the present invention and include ultrasonic bonding, adhesive bonding and other suitable bonding methods. Once the bonded layers pass through nip 64, the elastomeric layer is allowed to relax and to gather the other layers.

In a general embodiment of composite 2, there is a thermoplastic liner 4, thermoplastic transfer layer 22, thermoplastic elastomeric layer 6, thermoplastic wicking layer 24, thermoplastic absorbent medium 8 and thermoplastic outer cover 10. With this general embodiment, the temperature at which pattern roll 58 and anvil roll 60 are maintained falls within a range of 0 to about 204.4°C (about 0 to 400°F). The nip pressure at nip 64 is generally between 0 to about 1.05 kg/mm² (0 to about 1500 psi) and the bond area as a percentage of the total surface area, is between about 1% to about 50%. The roll speed of pattern roll 58 and anvil 60 can also vary between 0 to about 304.8 meter (about 0 to 1,000 feet) per minute. As roll speed is increased or decreased, the required temperatures & pressures will also change as a function of the thermoplastic materials making up the various layers.

In a specific form, pattern roll 58 is maintained at a temperature between about 126.7°C to about 165.6°C (about 260°F to about 330°F) and anvil 60 is maintained at a temperature between about 23.9°C to about 98.9°C (about 75°F to about 210°F). The pressure at nip 64 is about .02 kg/mm² to about .06 kg/mm² (about 30 to about 80 psi), the roll speed is about 4.6 meters to about 9.2 meters (about 15 ft to about 30 ft) per minute, and the bond area is about 10% to 20%. These particular parameters apply to a liner 4 made of spunbonded polypropylene having a basis weight of about 13.6 grams per square meter (about 0.4 oz. per square yard), wicking layer 24 being a carded web of about 25% by weight polyester and 75% by weight polypropylene with a basis weight of about 50 grams per square meter; elastomeric layer 6 being made of Kraton G-2740X having a basis weight of about 70 grams per square meter; absorbent medium 8 being a mixture of about 75% by

weight polyester and 25% by weight of binder and having mixed therewith a superabsorbent having a basis weight of about 16 grams per square meter, the overall absorbent medium 8 having a basis weight of about 70 grams per square meter; and outer cover 10 being a film of polyester having a thickness of about .015 mm, (about 0.6 mils).

In another form, the temperature of pattern roll 58 is about 65.6°C to about 121°C (about 150°F to about 250°F), and the temperature of anvil 60 is about 23.9°C to about 98.9°C (about 75°F to about 210°F). The pressure at nip 64 is about .02 kg/mm² to about .06 kg/mm² (about 30 to about 80 psi), the roll speed is about 4.6 meters to 9.2 meters (about 15 to about 30 feet) per minute, and the bonded area is about 10% to about 20%. These parameters apply to a composite 2 comprising a liner 4 of spunbonded polyethylene having a basis weight of about 13.6 grams per square meter (about 0.4 ounces per square yard); wicking layer 24 being a carded web of about 70% by weight polyester and 30% by weight of a suitable binder, having an overall basis weight of about 50 grams per square meter; elastomeric layer 6 being made of Kraton G-2740X having a basis weight of about 70 grams per square meter; absorbent medium 8 being a web of about 60% by weight fluff pulp and 40% by weight of polyethylene and having mixed therewith a superabsorbent having a basis weight of about 16 grams per square meter, the overall basis weight of absorbent medium 8 being about 70 grams per square meter; and outer cover 10 being a polyethylene film having a thickness of about .015 mm (about 0.6 mils).

In another form, pattern roll 58 has a temperature of about 121.1°C to about 154.4°C (about 250°F to about 310°F) and anvil 60 has a temperature of about 15.6°C to about 32°C, (about 60°F to about 90°F). The pressure at nip 64 is about .014 kg/mm² to about .028 kg/mm² (about 20 psi to about 40 psi), the roll speeds about 3 meters to about 6 meters (about 10 to about 20 feet) per minute, and the bond area between about 15% to about 25%. These parameters apply to a composite 2 comprising a liner 4 of spunbonded polypropylene having a basis weight of about 13.6 grams per square meter (about 0.4 ounces per square yard); a transfer layer 22 being a carded web of about 50% by weight polyester and about 50% by weight polypropylene and having a basis weight of about 30 grams per square meter; elastomeric layer 6 being made of Kraton G-2740X having a basis weight of about 70 grams per square meter; absorbent medium 8 being a web of about 60% by weight wood fluff pulp and about 40% by weight of polyethylene and having a superabsorbent mix therewith having a basis weight of about 16 grams per square meter, the

overall basis weight of absorbent medium 8 being about 165 grams per square meter; and outer cover 10 being a polyethylene film having a thickness of about .015 mm (about 0.6 mils).

While this invention has been described as having a preferred embodiment, it will be understood that it is capable of further modifications. This application is therefore intended to cover any variations, uses or adaptations of the invention following the general principles thereof, and including such departures from the present disclosure as come within known or customary practice in the art of which this invention pertains and fall within the limits of the appended claims.

Claims

1. A stretchable absorbent composite (2) for receiving, absorbing, and retaining human liquids and waste materials, comprising a liquid-pervious layer (4), a liquid-impervious layer (10), and an absorbent layer (8) between said liquid-pervious layer (4) and said liquid-impervious layer (10), characterized by:
 - a stretchable layer (6) between said liquid-pervious layer (4) and said liquid-impervious layer (10), said stretchable layer (6) being bonded in a stretched condition to the other said layers (4, 8, 10) and forming a plurality of rugosities (14) on either side of said stretchable layer (6) and in all of said layers (4, 8, 10) upon relaxation thereof; and wherein either
 - said absorbent layer (8) is adjacent said liquid-impervious layer (10), and said stretchable layer (6) is between said liquid-pervious layer (4) and said absorbent layer (8), and wherein said stretchable layer (6) has a plurality of apertures (12) therein; or
 - said absorbent layer (8) is adjacent said liquid-pervious layer (4), and said stretchable layer (6) is between said liquid-impervious layer (10) and said absorbent layer (8);
 - whereby said rugosities (14) receive liquids and waste materials therein for absorption and retention by said layers.
2. The composite of claim 1, wherein said stretchable layer (6) has an elasticity between about 10% to about 800%.
3. The composite of one of the preceding claims further comprising a liquid wicking layer (24) between said liquid - pervious layer (4) and said absorbent layer (8) for wicking liquid generally in the X-and Y-directions prior to absorption in said absorbent layer (8).

4. The composite of claim 3, further comprising a liquid transfer layer (22) between said liquid-pervious layer (4) and said absorbent layer (8) for transferring liquid generally in the Z-direction therethrough and into said absorbent layer (8).
5. The composite of claim 4 wherein said liquid transfer layer (22) is adjacent said liquid-pervious layer (4).
6. The composite of one of the preceding claims wherein the bonded area or said layers is from about 1% to about 50% of the total area of said composite (2).
7. A stretchable absorbent composite (2) according to claim 1 comprising:
 - a liquid-pervious layer (4) made of thermoplastic material,
 - a liquid transfer layer (22) made of thermoplastic material and being adjacent said liquid-pervious layer (4),
 - a stretchable layer (6) adjacent said liquid transfer layer (22),
 - an absorbent layer (8) adjacent said stretchable layer (6), and
 - a liquid-impervious layer (10) made of thermoplastic material and being adjacent said absorbent layer (8),
 - said liquid-pervious layer (4), said liquid transfer layer (22), said absorbent layer (8) and said liquid-impervious layer (10) being bonded together,
 - said stretchable layer (6) being stretch-bonded to said liquid transfer layer (22) and said absorbent layer (8) and forcing a plurality of rugosities (14) in all of said layers.
8. The composite of claim 7 wherein said liquid-pervious layer (4) is made of polypropylene or polyethylene.
9. The composite of claim 8 wherein said liquid-pervious layer (4) is a spunbonded polypropylene or polyethylene.
10. The composite of claim 7 wherein said liquid transfer layer (22) is a carded web of thermoplastic material.
11. The composite of claim 10 wherein said carded web of thermoplastic material includes polyester.
12. The composite of one of claims 7 to 11 wherein said absorbent layer (8) is wood pulp fluff.

13. The composite of claim 12 wherein said fluff absorbent layer includes superabsorbent material.
14. The composite of one of claims 7 to 11 wherein said absorbent layer (8) is made of thermoplastic material. 5
15. The composite of one of claims 7 to 14 wherein said stretchable layer (6) is stretched in multidirections during bonding to said layers. 10
16. The composite of one of claims 7 to 15 wherein said liquid-impervious layer (10) is a film of polypropylene or polyethylene. 15
17. The composite of one of claims 7 to 16 further comprising a liquid wicking layer (24) between said liquid transfer layer (22) and said liquid-impervious layer (10). 20
18. The composite of one of claims 7 to 17 wherein the bonded area of said layers is from about 1% to about 50% of the total area of said composite. 25
19. A method of making the stretchable absorbent composite, of claim 1, comprising the steps of : 30
 - providing a liquid-pervious layer, a stretchable layer, an absorbent layer, and a liquid-impervious layer,
 - stretching the stretchable layer,
 - bonding the layers together with the stretchable layer in the stretched state,
 - releasing the bonded layers, and 35
 - forming a plurality of rugosities in the liquid-pervious layer, the absorbent layer and the liquid-impervious layer upon relaxation of the stretchable layer. 40
20. The method of claim 19 wherein the stretchable layer is stretched in one direction only. 45
21. The method of claim 19 wherein the stretchable layer is stretched in multiple directions.
22. The method of one of claims 19 to 21 further comprising the step of aperturing the stretchable layer. 50
23. The method of one of claims 19 to 22 further comprising the step of providing a transfer layer between the liquid-pervious layer and the liquid-impervious layer. 55

24. The method of one of claims 19 to 23 further comprising the step of providing a wicking layer between the liquid-pervious layer and the liquid-impervious layer.

25. The method of one of claims 19 to 24 further comprising the step of at least partially elastically immobilizing selected areas of the layers.

Patentansprüche

1. Dehnbarer absorbierender Verbundstoff (2) zum Aufnehmen, Absorbieren und Zurückhalten menschlicher Flüssigkeiten und Ausscheidungsstoffe, mit einer flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4), einer flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10) und einer absorbierenden Schicht (8) zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10), gekennzeichnet durch eine dehnbare Schicht (6) zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10), wobei die dehnbare Schicht (6) in gestrecktem Zustand mit den anderen Schichten (4, 8, 10) verbunden wird und, wenn sie entspannt wird; eine Mehrzahl von Falten (14) auf beiden Seiten der dehnbaren Schicht (6) und in jeder der Schichten (4, 8, 10) bildet, und wobei entweder die absorbierende Schicht (8) neben der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10) angeordnet ist und die dehnbare Schicht (6) zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) und der absorbierenden Schicht (8) angeordnet ist, und wobei die dehnbare Schicht (6) eine Mehrzahl von Öffnungen (12) aufweist, oder die absorbierende Schicht (8) neben der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) angeordnet ist, und die dehnbare Schicht (6) zwischen der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10) und der absorbierenden Schicht (8) angeordnet ist; wodurch die Falten (14) Flüssigkeiten und Ausscheidungsstoffe aufnehmen, die dann von den Lagen absorbiert und zurückgehalten werden.
2. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 1, wobei die dehnbare Schicht (6) eine Elastizität von etwa 10 bis etwa 800% aufweist.
3. Verbundstoff nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, desweiteren enthaltend eine Dochtmaterialschiicht (24) zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) und der absorbierenden Schicht (8) zum Saugen von Flüssigkeit im allgemeinen in der X- und Y-Richtung, bevor sie in der absorbierenden Schicht (8) absorbiert wird.

4. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 3, desweiteren enthaltend eine Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) und der absorbierenden Schicht (8) zum Transportieren von Flüssigkeit im allgemeinen in der Z-Richtung und in die absorbierende Schicht (8). 5
5. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 4, wobei die Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) neben der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) angeordnet ist. 10
6. Verbundstoff nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei die Verbindungsfläche der Schichten etwa 1% bis etwa 50 % der Gesamtfläche des Verbundstoffs (2) ausmacht. 15
7. Dehnbarer absorbierender Verbundstoff (2) nach Anspruch 1, mit einer flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) aus einem thermoplastischen Material, einer neben der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht (4) angeordneten Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) aus einem thermoplastischen Material, einer neben der Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) angeordneten dehnbaren Schicht (6), einer neben der dehnbaren Schicht (6) angeordneten absorbierenden Schicht (8), und einer neben der absorbierenden Schicht (8) angeordneten flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10) aus thermoplastischem Material, wobei die flüssigkeitsdurchlässige Schicht (4), die Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22), die absorbierende Schicht (8) und die flüssigkeitsundurchlässige Schicht (10) miteinander verbunden sind, wobei die dehnbare Schicht (6) mit der Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) und der absorbierenden Schicht (8) streckverbunden ist und eine Mehrzahl von Falten (14) in jeder dieser Schichten bildet. 20 25 30 35 40
8. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 7, wobei die flüssigkeitsdurchlässige Schicht (4) aus Polypropylen oder Polyethylen hergestellt ist. 45
9. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 8, wobei die flüssigkeitsdurchlässige Schicht (4) ein spinngebundenes Polypropylen oder Polyethylen ist. 50
10. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 7, wobei die Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) ein kardiertes Vlies aus thermoplastischem Material ist. 55
11. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 10, wobei das kardierte Vlies aus thermoplastischem Material Polyester enthält.
12. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 11, wobei die absorbierende Schicht (8) aus Zellstoffflaum besteht.
13. Verbundstoff nach Anspruch 12, wobei die absorbierende Flaumschicht superabsorbierendes Material enthält.
14. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 11, wobei die absorbierende Schicht (8) aus thermoplastischem Material hergestellt ist.
15. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 14, wobei die dehnbare Schicht (6) in viele Richtungen gestreckt wird, während sie mit den Schichten verbunden wird.
16. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 15, wobei die flüssigkeitsundurchlässige Schicht (10) ein Polypropylen- oder Polyethylenfilm ist.
17. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 16, desweiteren enthaltend eine flüssigkeitsaufnehmende Dochtmaterialschicht (24) zwischen der Flüssigkeitstransportschicht (22) und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht (10).
18. Verbundstoff nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 17, wobei die Verbindungsfläche der Schichten etwa 1% bis etwa 50% der Gesamtfläche des Verbundstoffs ausmacht.
19. Verfahren zur Herstellung des dehnbaren absorbierenden Verbundstoffs nach Anspruch 1, welches die folgenden Schritte umfaßt:
Zurverfügungstellen einer flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht, einer dehnbaren Schicht, einer absorbierenden Schicht und einer flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht,
Strecken der dehnbaren Schicht,
Verbinden der Schichten mit der dehnbaren Schicht im gestreckten Zustand,
Loslassen der verbundenen Schichten, und
Bilden einer Mehrzahl von Falten in der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht, der absorbierenden Schicht und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht, nachdem die dehnbare Schicht entspannt wurde.
20. Verfahren nach Anspruch 19, wobei die dehnbare Schicht nur in eine Richtung gestreckt wird.
21. Verfahren nach Anspruch 19, wobei die dehnbare Schicht in viele Richtungen gestreckt wird.
22. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 19 bis 21, bei dem als weiterer Schritt die dehnbare

Schicht mit Öffnungen versehen wird.

23. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 19 bis 22, bei dem als weiterer Schritt eine Transportschicht zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht bereitgestellt wird. 5
24. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 19 bis 23, bei dem als weiterer Schritt eine Dochtmaterialschicht zwischen der flüssigkeitsdurchlässigen Schicht und der flüssigkeitsundurchlässigen Schicht bereitgestellt wird. 10
25. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 19 bis 24, bei dem als weiterer Schritt ausgewählte Bereiche der Schichten zumindest teilweise elastisch immobilisiert werden. 15

Revendications

1. Composite absorbant et étirable (2) pour recevoir, absorber et retenir des liquides, et des matériaux déchets humains, comprenant une couche perméable aux liquides (4), une couche imperméable aux liquides (10) et une couche absorbante (8) entre ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) et ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10), caractérisé par :
- une couche étirable (6) entre ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) et ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10), ladite couche étirable (6) étant liée à l'état étiré auxdites autres couches (4, 8, 10) et formant une série de rugosités (14) sur les deux côtés de ladite couche étirable (6) et dans toutes les couches (4,8,10) lors du relâchement de celle-ci ; et dans lequel
- soit ladite couche absorbante (8) est voisine de ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10), et ladite couche étirable (6) est comprise entre ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) et ladite couche absorbante (8), et dans lequel ladite couche étirable (6) comporte une série de perforations (12) ;
- soit ladite couche absorbante (8) est voisine de ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4), et ladite couche étirable (6) est comprise entre ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10) et ladite couche absorbante (8) ;
- grâce à quoi lesdites rugosités (14) reçoivent les liquides et les matériaux déchets pour l'absorption et la rétention par lesdites couches.
2. Composite selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ladite couche étirable (6) a une élasticité comprise entre environ 10% et environ 800%. 55

3. Composite selon l'une des revendications précédentes, comprenant en outre une couche à effet de mèche vis-à-vis des liquides (24), comprise entre ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) et ladite couche absorbante (8), pour exercer un effet de mèche sur les liquides généralement dans les directions X et Y avant l'absorption dans ladite couche absorbante (8).
4. Composite selon la revendication 3, comprenant en outre une couche de transfert de liquides (22), comprise entre ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) et ladite couche absorbante (8), pour transférer le liquide généralement dans la direction Z au travers et jusque dans ladite couche absorbante (8).
5. Composite selon la revendication 4, dans lequel ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22) est voisine de ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4).
6. Composite selon l'une des revendications précédentes, dans lequel la zone liée desdites couches représente d'environ 1% à environ 50% de la surface totale dudit composite (2).
7. Composite absorbant et étirable (2) selon la revendication 1, comprenant :
- une couche perméable aux liquides (4) faite d'un matériau thermoplastique,
- une couche de transfert de liquides (22) faite d'un matériau thermoplastique et voisine de ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4),
- une couche étirable (6) voisine de ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22),
- une couche absorbante (8) voisine de ladite couche étirable (6),
- une couche imperméable aux liquides (10) faite d'un matériau thermoplastique et voisine de ladite couche absorbante (8),
- ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4), ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22), ladite couche absorbante (8) et ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10) étant liées ensemble,
- ladite couche étirable (6) étant liée à l'état étiré à ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22) et à ladite couche absorbante (8) et formant une série de rugosités (14) dans toutes les couches.
8. Composite selon la revendication 7, dans lequel ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) est faite de polypropylène ou de polyéthylène.

9. Composite selon la revendication 8, dans lequel ladite couche perméable aux liquides (4) est faite d'un polypropylène ou de polyéthylène lié au filage.

5

10. Composite selon la revendication 7, dans lequel ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22) est une nappe cardée de matériau thermoplastique.

10

11. Composite selon la revendication 10, dans lequel ladite nappe cardée de matériau thermoplastique comprend un polyester.

12. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 11, dans lequel ladite couche absorbante (8) est faite de duvet de pulpe de bois.

15

13. Composite selon la revendication 12, dans lequel ladite couche absorbante en duvet renferme un matériau superabsorbant.

20

14. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 11, dans lequel ladite couche absorbante (8) est faite d'un matériau thermoplastique.

25

15. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 14, dans lequel ladite couche étirable (6) est étirée dans des directions multiples pendant la liaison auxdites couches.

30

16. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 15, dans lequel ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10) est un film de polypropylène ou de polyéthylène.

35

17. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 16, comprenant en outre une couche à effet de mèche vis-à-vis des liquides (24) entre ladite couche de transfert de liquides (22) et ladite couche imperméable aux liquides (10).

40

18. Composite selon l'une des revendications 7 à 17, dans lequel la surface liée desdites couches représente d'environ 1% à environ 50% de la surface totale dudit composite.

45

19. Procédé de fabrication du composite absorbant et étirable selon la revendication 1, comprenant les étapes suivantes :

50

la prévision d'une couche perméable aux liquides d'une couche étirable, d'une couche absorbante et d'une couche imperméable aux liquides,

l'étirage de la couche étirable,

55

la liaison des couches ensemble avec la couche étirable à l'état étiré,

le relâchement des couches liées, et

la formation d'une série de rugosités dans la couche perméable aux liquides, la couche absorbante et la couche imperméable aux liquides lors du relâchement de la couche étirable.

20. Procédé selon la revendication 19, dans lequel la couche étirable est étirable selon une des directions seulement.

21. Procédé selon la revendication 19, dans lequel la couche étirable est étirable dans des directions multiples.

22. Procédé selon l'une des revendications 19 à 21, comprenant en outre l'étape de perforation de la couche étirable.

23. Procédé selon l'une des revendications 19 à 22, comprenant en outre l'étape de prévision d'une couche de transfert entre la couche perméable aux liquides et la couche imperméable aux liquides.

24. Procédé selon l'une des revendications 19 à 23, comprenant en outre l'étape de prévision d'une couche à effet de mèche entre la couche perméable aux liquides et la couche imperméable aux liquides.

25. Procédé selon l'une des revendications 19 à 24, comprenant en outre l'étape d'immobilisation, au moins partiellement élastiquement, de zones sélectionnées des couches.

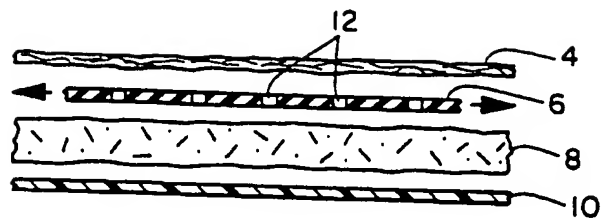


FIG. 1

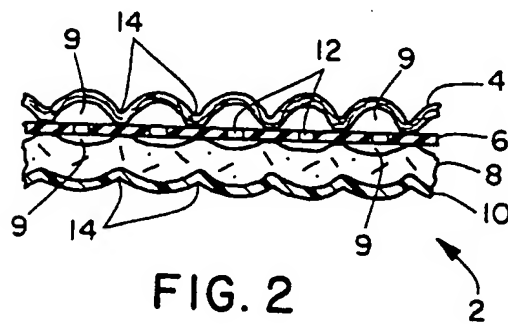


FIG. 2

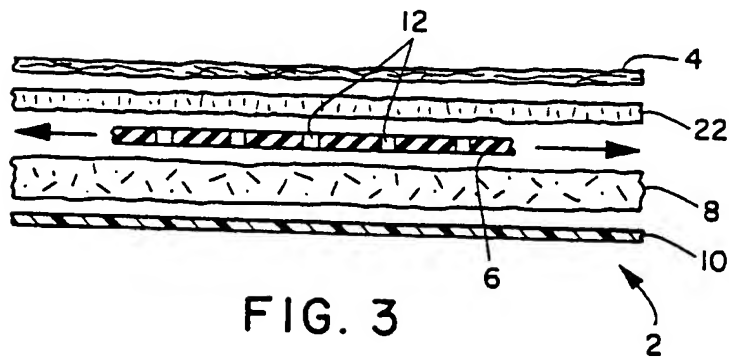


FIG. 3

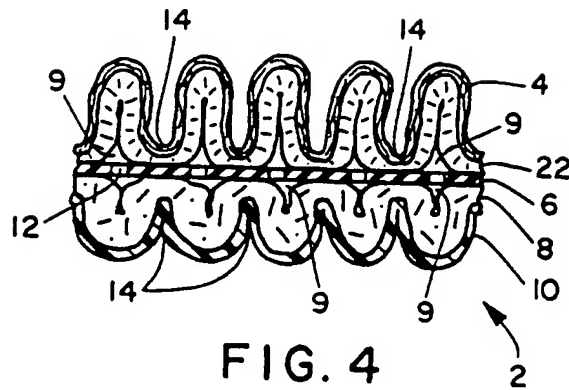


FIG. 4

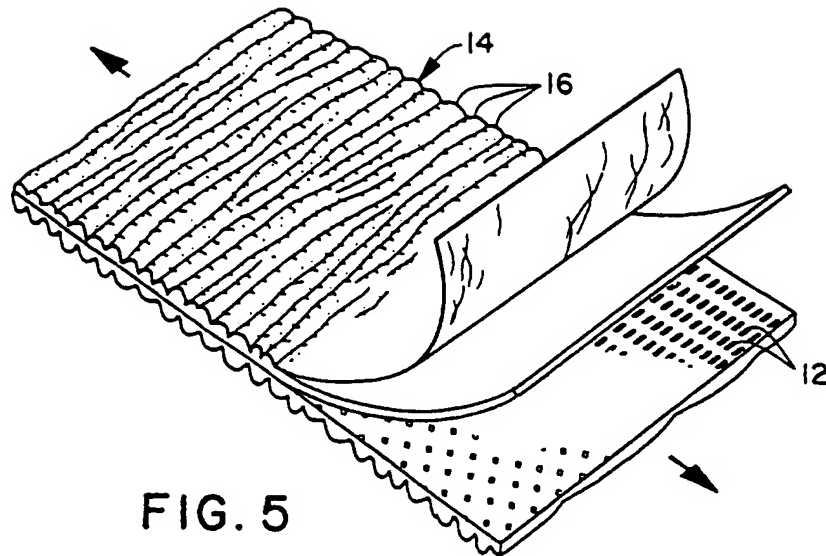


FIG. 5

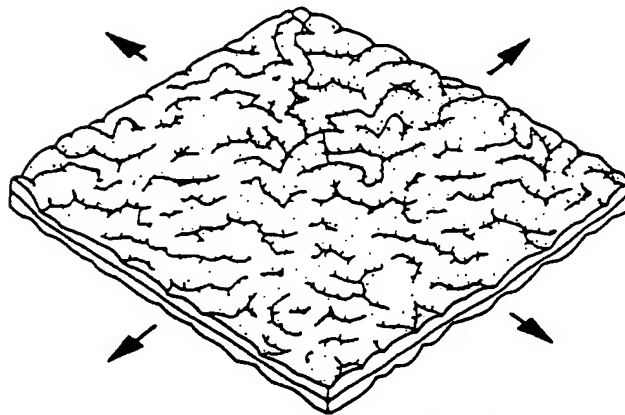


FIG. 5A

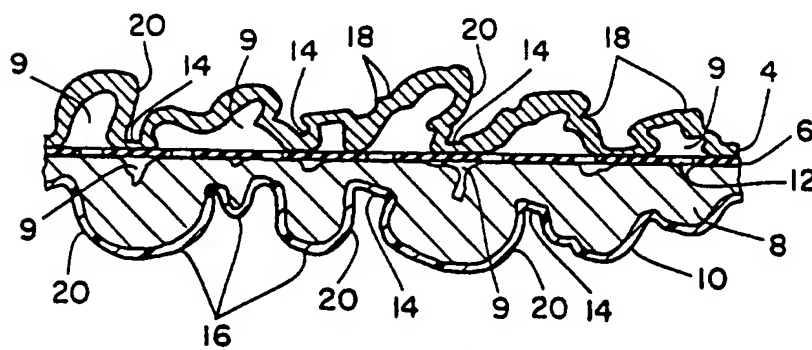


FIG. 5B

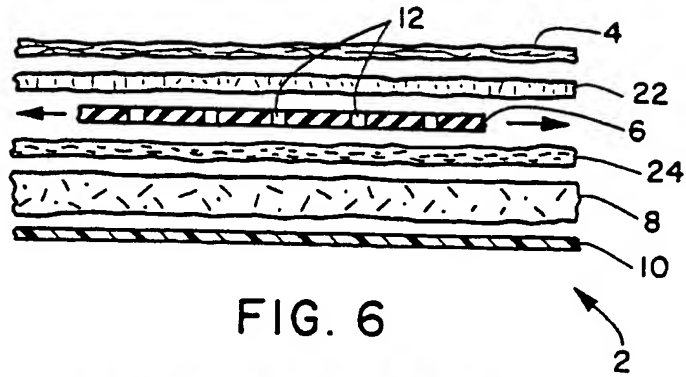


FIG. 6

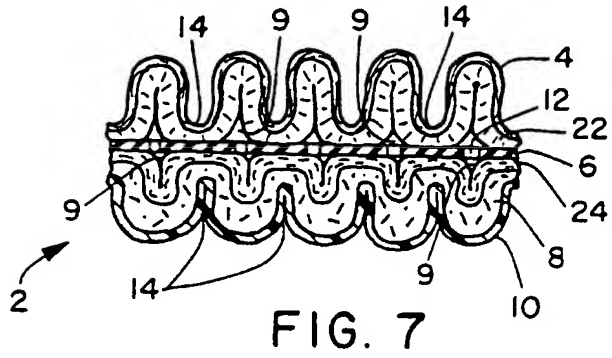


FIG. 7

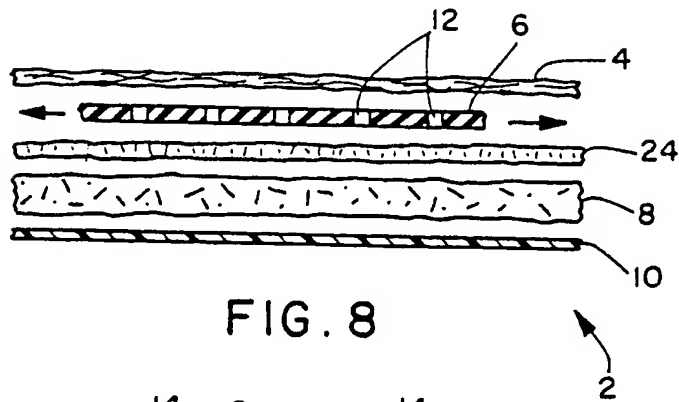


FIG. 8

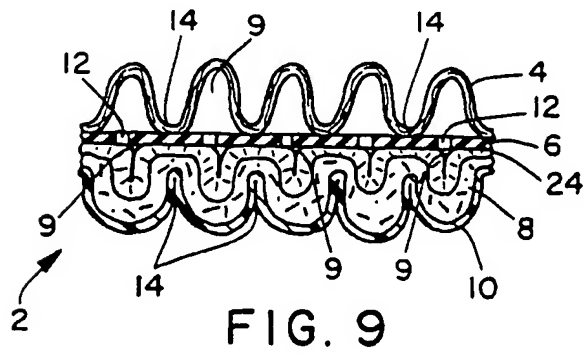


FIG. 9

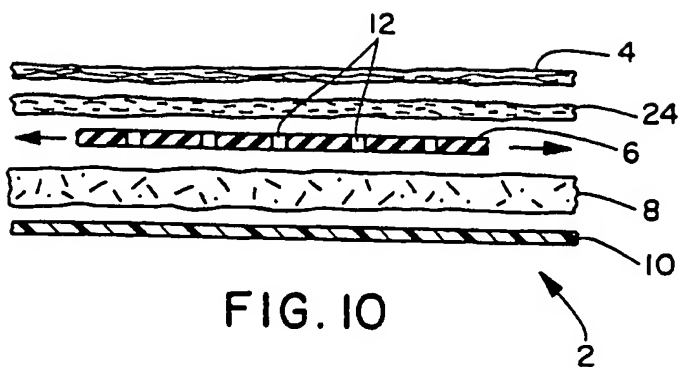


FIG. 10

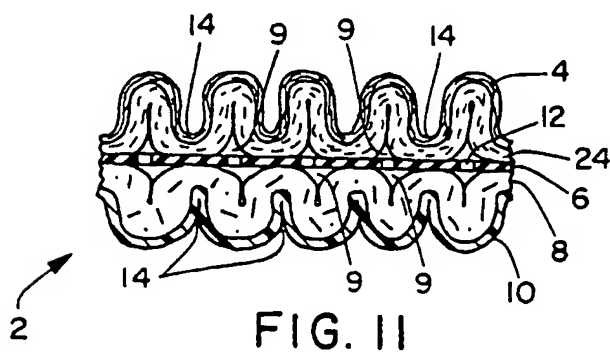


FIG. 11

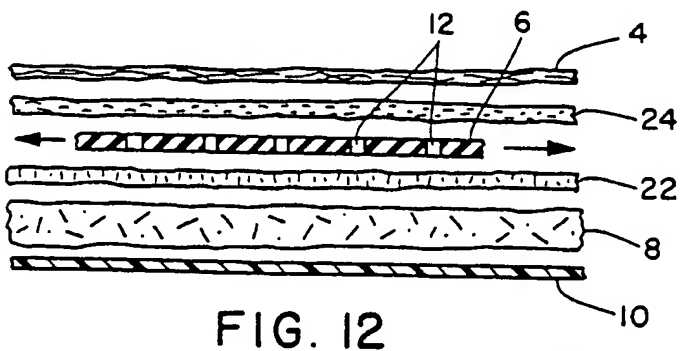


FIG. 12

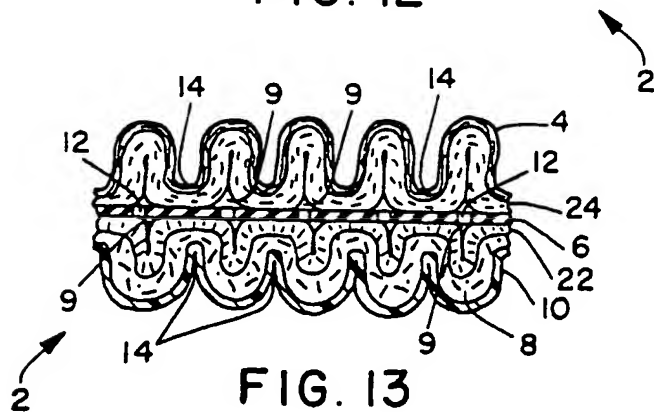


FIG. 13

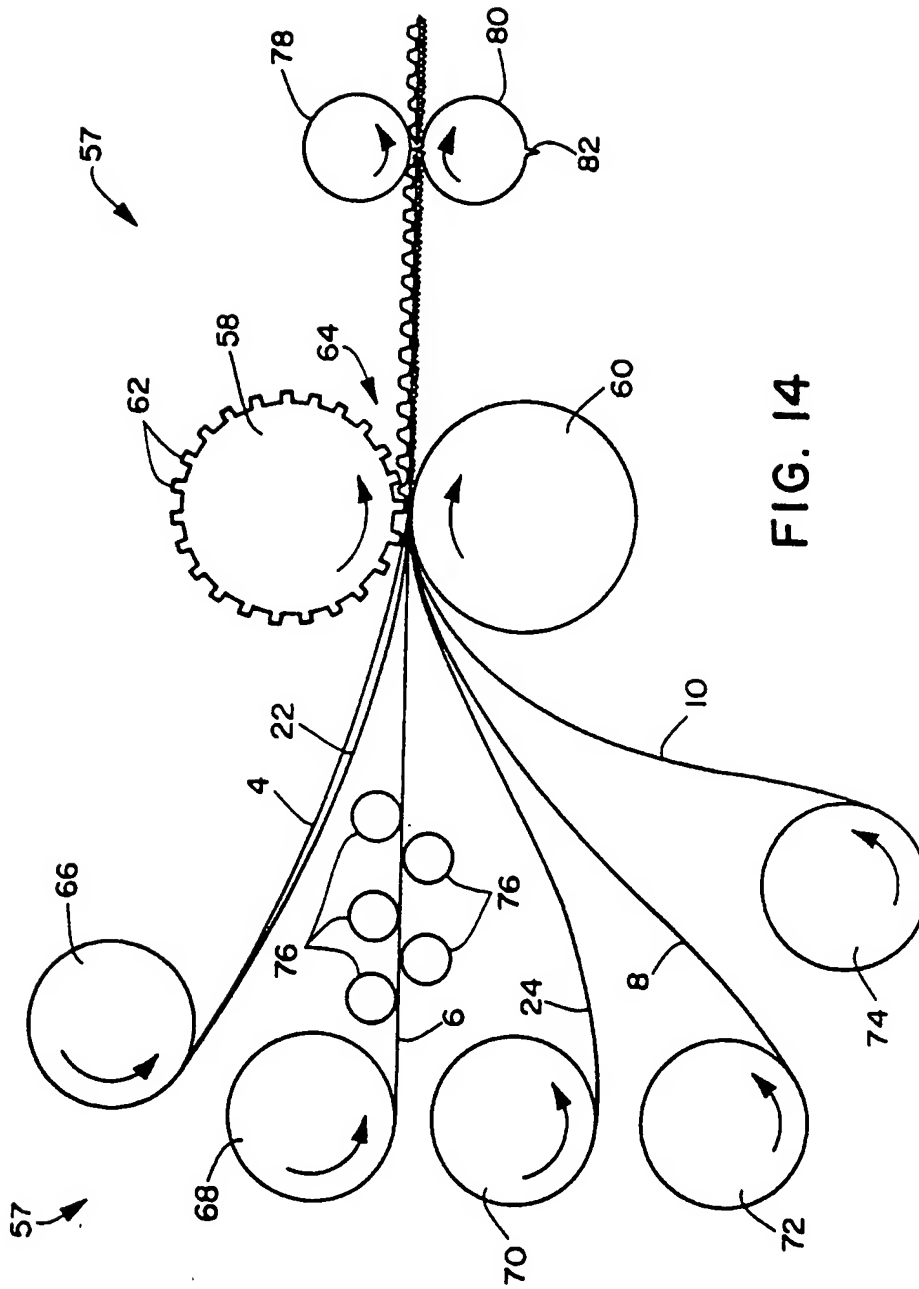


FIG. 14

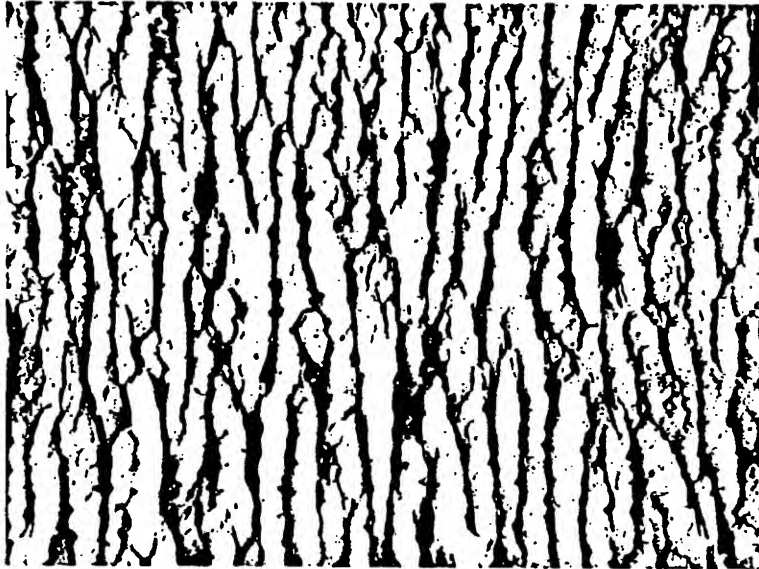


FIG. 15

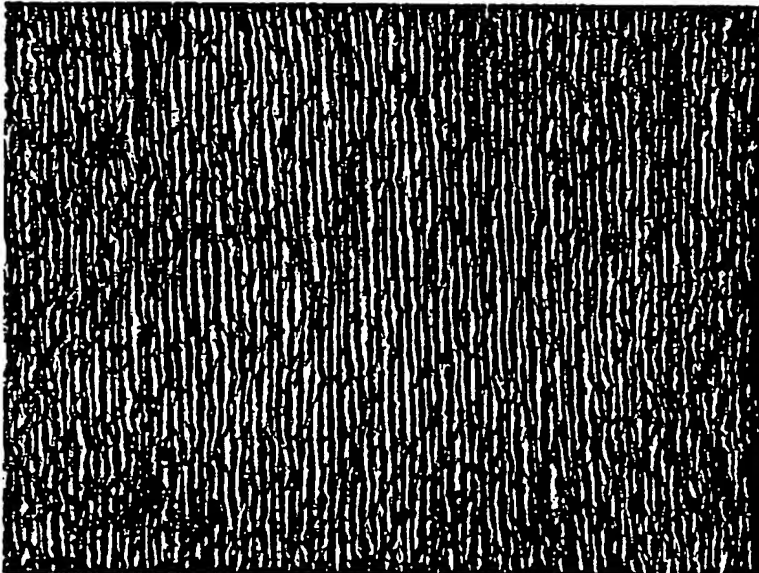


FIG. 16

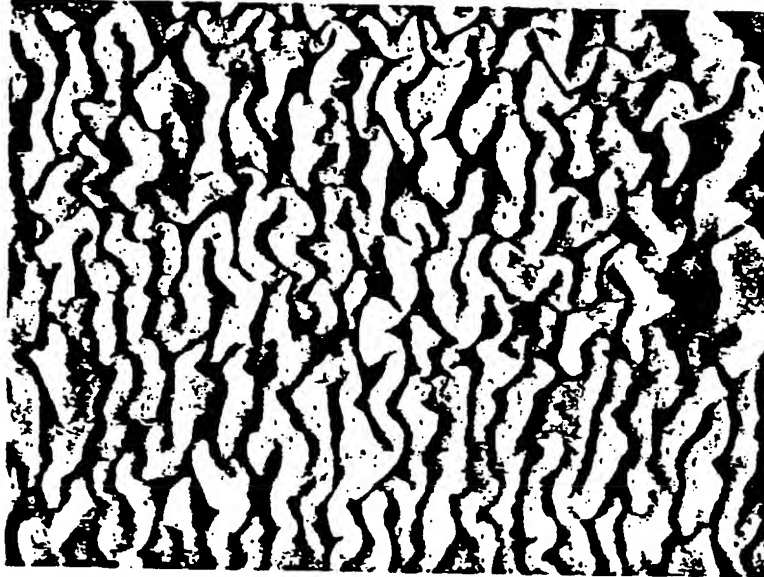


FIG. 17

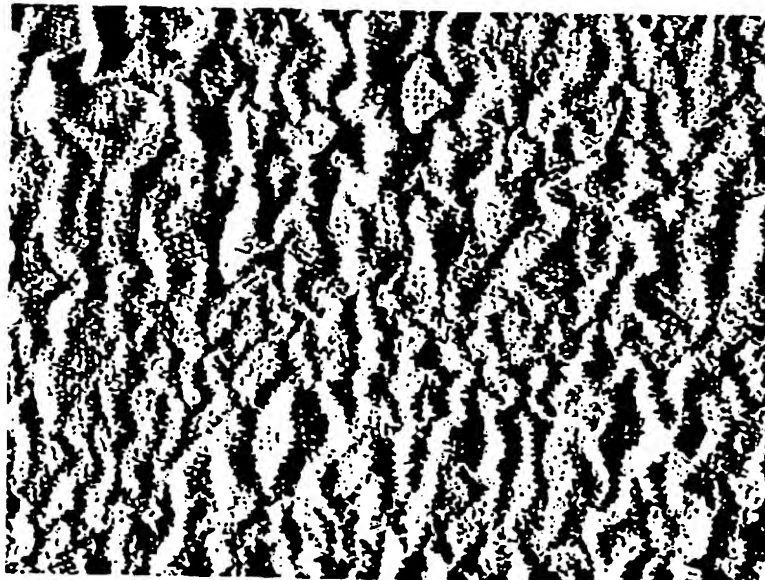


FIG. 18